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PH 501 Philosophy of Christian Religion

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PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION—PHI 501

Asbury Theological Seminary

(Florida Campus)

Spring 2008

Thursdays 6:15 pm -9:00 p.m.

Instructor: William Rodriguez, PhD (candidate)

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Course Description:

The Philosophical exploration of the classical issues of religious thought, such as the existence and reality of God, the problem of evil, religious experience, and religious pluralism, and ethics.

Course Objectives:

Satisfaction of the course requirements will enable the student:

- To *gain* an understanding of the variety of answers that have been offered to explain questions concerning the relationship between religion and science.
- To *introduce* students to some classic and contemporary philosophical texts.
- To *sharpen* one's skills in identifying and evaluating arguments.
- To *improve* one's ability to think and write clearly and critically.
- To *gain* a more complete and refined understanding of key theological issues.
- To *identify* and *appreciate* the overlapping concerns of philosophy and theology.

Required Texts:

1. Peterson, Michael, ed. *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
2. *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*, by C. Stephen Evans (InterVarsity Press, 1982)
3. *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, by Diogenes Allen (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989)
4. *Evil and the Justice of God*, by N.T. Wright (InterVarsity Press, 2006)

Recommended Text:

Philosophy for Understanding Theology, by Diogenes Allen (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1985)

Course Requirements:

1. You are required to read the material, and prepare the required assignments prior to class. You should consult a good dictionary of philosophy as part of the preparation for class (Macmillan, Harper Collins, Oxford or Cambridge).

Frederick Copelson's multi-volume History of Philosophy is also a good source of information.

2. As part of the class you will be required to watch a number of films before class. In class we will view short clips and explore the religious and philosophical themes contained therein.
3. There will be no examinations for this class.
4. **Reading log:** Students are required to complete a weekly reading log, two to three pages. These logs will include the following parts: a one paragraph précis for each article; a **K-W-L** log (a template will be handed out in class), and questions or debate points. Random students will present their logs at the beginning of the class during the debriefing part of the class. Others will be called upon randomly in order to enrich the class discussion. This oral contribution will receive a grade.
 - a. The **logs** should include the following: identify the major issue or issues in a section of the course; examine the main of each author; evaluate any perceived problem (logical fallacies, inconsistencies, etc) and strengths of each piece; explain how the issue presents a particular challenge to Christian theology and how the issue can be addressed satisfactorily; and finally explore how each author has helped to inform your understanding of the issue.
 - b. **Recommendations:** You must incorporate the lectures, readings, discussions and other materials related to the course. Please do not use outside sources (internet or textual). You must provide all sides of the question, not just the points that appeal to you or your opinion.
5. **Short Paper/Presentation:** Students must write and present a one to two page soliloquy for one of the theologians/ philosophers read in class. Students must include biographical data and discuss the most salient contributions to the Philosophy of Religion. (A sign up sheet will be distributed in class.) You must present on the appointed day. Failure to do so will result in a zero for the assignment.
6. **Final paper:** Students will be required to write their own theodicy. They must create or relate a real life case that challenges conventional theological ideas of God, goodness and justice. Students must discuss the issue philosophically but with a pastoral bent. Students must articulate a cogent, intelligent, informed and perceptive response. Students will be required to address the philosophical concerns and themes discussed in the readings, discussions and readings.
 - a. Each paper will consist of **5-8 pages of text** to be turned in at the last meeting of the course. No work will be accepted after the last day scheduled for this class. This (and all written work) should follow the **MLA** or Turabian models, **double spaced**, using a **12 point Times New Roman font**. Each paper should have a title page. The title page, endnote and bibliography do not count toward the page minimum. Please number

the pages and do not head each paper with your name or class information. Failure to follow these instructions and a poorly written paper will incur a grade **letter deduction**.

- b. **What I will be looking for in your work:** You will be expected to explain the concerns and issues in your own words. You will be expected to defend logically your positions. You will be required to address and include the class material (readings and lectures) in your work. Be sure you write clearly and consistent, provide reasons for your answers, pay attention to grammar and syntax, use academic and inclusive language, and please feel free to consult with the professor concerning your work (this is particularly important for the final paper).

5. Classroom etiquette:

- a. **Be on time for class:** If this only happens once or twice it's probably not a big deal. If it happens more often then some explanation should be given to the instructor. Please keep in mind that late arrivals can be distracting to the instructor and disruptive to the class.
- b. **Talking in class.** There are two aspects to this. First, conversations need to stop when the instructor is ready to begin class. Second, there are often times when one needs to ask a question of a person sitting nearby. Brief, and quiet, comments along the lines of "What was that point?," or "Was that argument correct?" are certainly understandable. You should not, however, carry on conversations in class. This is true even if they happen to be related to the topic. Even if such conversations are relatively quiet and do not seem to disturb anyone nearby, they can be distracting to the instructor, not to mention rude.
- c. **Cell phones and computers.** Cell phones should be turned off if they cannot be set to a silent mode. Of course, you should not answer your cell phone during class. If you are expecting a really important call (e.g., wife going into labor, picked for the next *Survivor* series), then it might be a good idea to inform the instructor before class so it's less of a distraction if you leave the classroom to take the call.
Laptop computers can be used to follow the class power points but should not be used for web surfing, even if the material is course related. Common courtesy demands your full attention should be paid to the instructor. Under no circumstances should conversations and "show and tell" sessions take place during class. Abuses will result in the whole class being denied the privilege of laptop computer usage in class.
- d. **End of class.** Students sometimes try to hurry the end of class by beginning to gather books and rustling about a few minutes before the end of class. Again, this can be rude, particularly when others are trying to hear what the instructor is saying at the end of class. I realize that some instructors may have a habit of going over a few minutes, which can be a problem after a long day of classes. I, however, rarely have to do this and will often quit a few minutes early, so please don't try to hurry things along.

Method of Instruction:

1. Formal lectures.
2. Group Discussions, small group activities, and class debates (“devil’s” advocate method). Students may be called upon randomly to reflect on the readings so you must be prepared.
3. Video clips or films on specific topics, where possible and necessary.

Grading Procedure:

1. Participation and attendance: 10 points
2. Reflection logs: 50 points
3. Short paper/Presentation: 20 points
4. Final paper: 20 points
5. Grading Scale:
 - A (95 to 100) Exceptional work; surpassing course objectives
 - A- (90-94) Fine work
 - B + (87-89) Good, solid work
 - B (83-86) Good work
 - B- (80-82) Verging between good and acceptable work
 - C+ (77-79) Acceptable work; overall understanding
 - C (73-76) Acceptable work; significant gaps
 - C- (70-72) Serious gaps in achievement of course objectives
 - D+ (67-69) Marginal work; minimal achievement
 - D (63-66) Barely acceptable work
 - F Unacceptable work; fails to achieve course objectives

Course Schedule:

This course is divided into six sections. Each section has two or three lessons. The due dates for the required readings and the assignments are also given. The assignments must be handed in by the end of the class meeting time.

Summary of Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments
1	Feb. 14	Section I: Introduction	Reading: Evans 1-29 Peterson 8-12, 20-28, 35-44, 65-78
2	Feb. 21	Religion and Science	Reading: Allen 1-49; Evans 121-130; Peterson 549-562
3	Feb. 28	Section II: Arguments for Existence of God	Reading: Allen 50-96 ; Evans 45-76 Peterson 101-03,
4	March 6	Theistic Arguments: <i>Ontology, Cosmology, Teleology</i>	Reading: Peterson 176-81, 194-96, 223-31, 235-46
5	March 13	Theistic Arguments: <i>Moral, Experience, etc.</i>	Reading: Peterson 246-57, 241-247, 273-79 Luther's Heidelberg Disputation
6	March 20	Section III: Attributes of God	Reading: Allen 165-181; Peterson 131-46, 155-67
7	March 27	Acts of God: <i>Miracles</i>	Reading: Evans 97-119 Peterson 473-87
8	April 10	Section IV: The Problem of Evil	Reading: Evans 130-140 Peterson 292-304, 315-54, 365-76
9	April 17	The Problem of Evil:	Reading: Wright 13-129
10	April 24	The Problem of Evil: <i>Last Things</i>	Reading: Allen 99-127; Peterson 500- 520, 529-39; Wright 131-65
11	May 1	Section V: Faith and Reason	Reading: Allen 149-164; Evans 17-29; Peterson 92-96, 118-122
12	May 8	Section VI: Religious Pluralism	Reading: Evans 159- 184; Peterson 584-88, 597-618
13	May 15	Religious Pluralism	Reading: Allen 185-211 Final Paper due